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AUTHOR Grimshaw, William F.
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ABSTRACT

The most practical and productive response to how to deal with hard times seems to be coming from those rural schools which are renewing and energizing their partnership with business and the community. There are three keys to this cooperation: on all sides leaders specify the persons who are to work together; leaders see to it that people understand each other; and leaders make sure that teamwork is happening. Everything is put "up front." Citizens advisory boards can be a vital and productive resource when they have been trained in teamwork skills. Business and industry can provide speakers, in-service persons, instructors, and advice on management and curriculum. People from the community are eager and able to contribute and schools offer them the opportunity to demonstrate the work ethic. Networking draws an almost unlimited flow of useful operating information into the school setting. Among secrets of successful partnership for resource management are: school people should be encouraged to initiate outreach; involvement should be marked by joint planning and implementation undergirded with training in teamwork; and networks at all levels should be encouraged. Examples of school-business-community cooperation in Kalamazoo and other areas of Michigan are provided. (BRR)

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ENSURING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE THROUGH BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY COOPERATION

William F. Grimshaw
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College of Education
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
49008

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Around rural and urban public schools, as well as all in between, the most often heard buzz-phrase these days is "resource management." To most folks the buzz sends two meanings: "how to make do with less" and "how to find more." To rural school people, for the most part, the predicament is hardly new. They haven't been the target of Federal initiative in the past, nor are they the target of Federal disinitiative in the present.

But, for many, the times are harder. So how do they deal with this? The most practical and productive response seems to be coming from those rural schools which are renewing and energizing their partnership with business and the community. In short, they're ensuring educational excellence through business and community cooperation.

In Michigan's Kalamazoo County, where I work, as well as across the State, here is what the picture looks like:

1. Business/community are seen as offering schools large resources.

2. Business/community people are demonstrating their eagerness and ability to contribute; and, they are finding that the schools have something to offer them.

3. Total school operations are benefitting from the partnership.

4. Educators who are particularly effective "partners" are taking the initiative in building the partnership.

5. The most successful partnerships are being based on deliberately sought mutual understanding, joint planning and joint implementation.

6. Networking by school people locally and regionally is generating all kinds of productive ideas and contacts.

The keys to cooperation being used are three:

1. On the school side and on the business or community side the leaders specify the persons who are to work together; 2) the leaders see to it that those

who work together are oriented to each other's language and operations; 3) the leaders make sure that teamwork is happening.

The reasons given for such emphasis on skillful cooperation are rather basic. They avoid confusion as to the missions of the schools and business, and how school people and business people look at things. Everything is put "up front." This, then heads off defensiveness, misunderstanding, and disillusion.

Now consider some of the ways the generation and application of resources are working. You, very likely are aware of the extensive advisory work that goes on via the Vocational Education and Career Education Councils and committees working to develop curricular and instructional programs. It's a cooperative effort that takes very careful planning, orientation, and follow-thru.

In Kalamazoo County a rural network of seven school districts has formed a consortium to work with 15 or so craft and trade advisory committees made up of surrounding business and professional people helping to guide the Voc-Ed./ Career Ed. programs. According to Irv Cumming, the person in charge (he's director of Voc/Career Ed. in rural Comstock High School) the consortium provides a cost-effective impact on students: one administrative unit serves seven schools; they share facilities and reduce duplication; they offer more specialized trainings; they expand the number of offerings to students. Therefore, the consortium - advisory committee relationship is both effective and efficient. Take computer offerings, for example. About 14 categories of business people serve as advisors to keep this program "up-to-the-minute" in content and technique. It currently offers Basic, Cobol, and Fortran -- three languages in the 11th and 12th grades.

Another kind of cooperation is worth noting. In Kalamazoo County (and this kind of thing occurs elsewhere in Michigan) the Chamber of Commerce "Liberty Program" offers schools a continuous flow of speakers, in-service

persons, and instructors into the classrooms and school assemblies: some 500-600 resource persons, according to Cindy Huis of the Chamber. She emphasizes that "it's important to bring business into the classroom . . . to get across the basics of how to change with the times and be marketable." Then, she notes the commitment and enthusiasm of the business community, saying, "we have people ready and willing to drive far distances in rural areas to help."

The business and community resource is important in another way. Our county intermediate school district has organized an "Administrative Academy." During January and February, weekly, three-hour workshops (led by specialists in business management from business and industry) are provided to school administrators on such topics as "how to control staff absenteeism;" "decision-making;" "team building;" and a host of management skills/practices. School administrators say what skills they want training in; then, Administrators and business people plan and implement the offerings.

A variation of this resource offering is taking place in the county's Comstock Schools. Here, School Superintendent Bob Hammet, has focused on the resources of the neighboring Upjohn Company (pharmaceuticals). He developed a relationship with the company's Personnel Director, Henry Dahl, and currently Upjohn Company managers are helping Comstock develop both a management philosophy and training program. They're helping to develop position guides that are performance objective - results oriented and that will be used for pay determination on criteria of what an individual is expected to do -- in a time frame, and against standards of quality/quantity. Bob Hammet says "75% or more of the management skills and practices regarding people and budgets in business and schools are similar. Only our goals/objectives differ. I always call Henry now, and ask him for help when I need it."

There are countless different examples of resource development that could

be described all across the school spectrum, in addition to these illustrations from the curricular/instructional and management areas.

The citizen advisory committees assigned by School Boards on any number of issues are another vital and productive resource. When effectively tapped, this resource is helping to integrate the school and community in a genuine cooperative, productive relationship. In Galesburg, Michigan, a rural district also in Kalamazoo County, a 14-member citizens/students/teacher committee has succeeded in significantly improving school-community relations -- laying the foundation for stronger financial support of schools and closer cooperation between school staff and community members, affecting all school operations. They were convened by the Board and Superintendent and charged with finding ways to improve school community relations. This they did in a lengthy position paper's recommendation which the Board is adopting.

All such forms of cooperation have several things in common: people from the community are eager and able to contribute. And schools offer them something. Schools give business and community members the opportunity to demonstrate the work-ethic. Schools give people in business and community the opportunity to share their knowledges, skills, perspectives. This is being seen as a very important social exchange. As it takes place, communities develop a sense of community . . . which obviously impacts children and youth, positively.

Certainly total school operations can benefit from school-business/community cooperation. I have cited a few impacts on curriculum/instruction. I noted some impact on school management and services, such as personnel. These, together, represent total operations -- operations across the board. It is possible to spot a trend here. In Kalamazoo County citizen advisory committees (both school-appointed and self-appointed) are now scrutinizing the total curricular operation in depth. One school district's citizen group is examining discipline, communication, academic standards (goals/objectives).

Another district's 100-member citizen group is working on the full curriculum/instruction area, together with academic achievement, discipline, communications, finance, community participation, and other areas. They are examining performance, comparing district practices with model practices found elsewhere, and reporting recommendations to the Board. These are productive contributions. And they require enormous investments of time and energy -- and the citizens' own pocket money in many cases. This kind of activity is occurring (here and there) throughout the state. The schools and citizens are doing together what, in Michigan's hard economic times, very likely neither could do alone. And it directly impacts excellence in education: in learning and the delivery system by causing all to work together to deliver a better product. The interesting thing about such cooperation, is that the citizens don't recommend and run. They responsibly recommend doing now what schools can afford now -- they offer to chip in and help where school resources are meager. Michigan's economic strain is severe. In more than one nearby district the citizen co-curricular committee has seen to it the athletic, music, forensics, and other programs are funded with outside money as millage money disappeared. These contributions extend to other areas, too: Some groups even are buying minicomputers. Still others are into job-development.

The message that the community wants to help schools is loud and clear. A recent state-wide survey of Michigan Citizens, by county, "ala-Gallup" shows -- in rural areas -- that 72% to 79% of the citizens want more citizen involvement in the schools: and much of the focus here is on helping out in buildings. And 44% to 60% (depending on the county area) say they themselves are willing to "lend a hand," in classrooms, lunch rooms, libraries, and on playgrounds.

What makes such cooperation work? There are at least three reasons. First, the effective business and citizen involvement begins when educators take the initiative. The people making impact are the administrators, teachers,

coordinators - interested in and committed to tapping the community's total resources; committed to applying these resources effectively in the schools; and skilled in developing long-term, personal relationships with business and community people.

For example, Bob Liberty, the Vocational Education Director in Menominee High School in the western end of Michigan's Northern Penninsula, summarizes best what all others report: "The successes we've had are based on a combination of factors the first of which is the building and encouraging of building of non-structured personal relationships be instructors with individuals in business or the community. The second is amply recognizing the contributions of citizens with news reports, dinners, awards, etc. The third is go out into the community and ask for help and materials if you need them. The fourth is communicate with your graduates, with the whole community through open houses, shows of students' work: sell the schools. The fifth is invite citizens, business people into the school: Bob says: "we're always threatened that they'll know what we're doing, we're afraid . . . they'll be critical. But after their initial critique they say, 'what can we do to help you?' We've got to open our doors and not be afraid of skeletons in closets." Sixth, Bob says, "citizens have to work through on their own how to examine, understand, help get the best for the school system." In effect he says you can't tell them how to do their job. Yet they do need a certain kind of help.

Ineffective team-work can be the Achilles heel of advisory committees. Not long ago I surveyed a sample of Michigan 500+ school superintendents to learn whether they thought their advisory committees needed training to be effective. 80% report they have advisory groups. About 10% said they provided some kind of training, 90% do not. Yet, 72% said they should provide training whereas 28% said they need not. At the same time only 22% report their best

groups to be very effective; 72% only somewhat effective; and only 6% say they're not effective.

Advisory committees skilled in teamwork are more effective and more productive than committees not skilled in teamwork. Such skill seldom "happens." Rather, it is deliberately sought: either in operating experience, or, preferably through training. Take the Galesburg-Augusta Public Schools' experience, for example. The Superintendent and Board of Education decided to invite a group of citizens, students, teachers, and administrators to help improve school-community relations. Knowing the value of team-building to effective teamwork, John Wagar, the Superintendent, invited the newly formed advisory committee to participate in a series of workshops to develop teamwork skills. An arrangement was made with a trio of team-building facilitators from nearby Western Michigan University's Community Leadership Training Center to help. They then guided the 14 members of the new Citizens Advisory Committee through a series of evening workshops devoted to developing members' skills in interpersonal communication, consensus decision-making, problem solving, planning and evaluation. Over a period of about seven weeks the members discovered how to function as an effective, productive team. The results were outstanding. First, they produced a viable plan for improving school-community relations, which the School Board adopted. Second, they brought a new sense of community and unity to the school district. Charles Kasson, chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee put the outcome this way: "Our training . . . helped us away from the role of confrontation to one of cooperative determination of the most acceptable viewpoint and the most acceptable solution (to the problem of improving school community relations). With this cooperative effort and cooperative conclusion come a joint feeling that obstacles can be overcome, that a united effort can be achieved. With results come confidence and with confidence come more results."

For school and community, or business, to cooperate and coordinate efforts

to reach goals, teamwork is essential. And solid training in team-building can produce more productive, satisfying results for everyone. This fact is being realized more and more today. The skills of teamwork undergird the joint planning and joint implementation that is necessary to sound project development.

Another principle held in common by schools that are successful in business and community cooperative efforts is this: keep work meaningful and significant. For example, Wade Smith, Director of the Voc. Ed. Center in Branch County emphasizes "we never call advisory groups to confer unless there is important work to be done and they have an important role . . . this has been our mode of operation." Further, he points out: "we answer every committee recommendation. The schools don't run things -- we do it together", he stresses.

Parenthetically, I should note that Wade speaks with special pride of the 180 acre farm the Center operates for farm management instruction, complete with 200 hogs, beef, sheep, poultry. They also use minicomputers to teach soil analysis. Moreover, he emphasizes the close cooperation with FFA, 4-H, Agriculture teachers, and Michigan State University for enriching learning.

A very interesting variation of joint planning and joint implementation with business-government-and-the-community can be seen in the Hillsdale School District's community education program. Within their program a prize component is sharing office space with City Parks and Recreation, Department of Aging, Senior Citizens, etc. Another, and quite unique component is their computer utility: they sell programs to other school districts; operate time sharing and data processing for the county ISD, city and county government functions (city tax and utility billings, payroll, etc.); and, they offer some services to other school systems. Also, locally, they teach all the principal programming lanaguages.

Finally, it is worth noting that networking on a wide scale stands to optimize the results of business and community cooperation. Many of the examples mentioned above are based on networking. Networking's "purpose is largely exchange of information and other nonmaterial resources." It aims at improving the school/community quality of functions "not by adding costly services, but through making more available the large variety of educational services already offered by local and regional (and sometimes state and national) resources. A network mainly facilitates communication among individuals, involving exchange of ideas, methods, techniques, all kinds of useful tips, references, information. Networking draws an almost unlimited flow of useful operating information into the school setting -- to enhance the quality and quantity of business/community cooperation. Individual members of consortiums, and agencies are found throughout Michigan building cooperative arrangements and developing other linkages in order to gather and operationalize ideas.

In summary, the secrets of successful partnership for resource-management are these:

1. Teachers and administrators should be encouraged to initiate outreach to business and community people in general to help with school programs.

2. Involvement should be marked by joint planning and joint implementation of programs and projects, undergirded with training in teamwork.

3. Involvement should be based on thorough, mutual understanding through inservice/training in relevant functions, roles, processes.

4. Community members' contributions to schools should be rewarded with ample recognition.

5. Networks at the local, regional, and also (state and national) levels should be encouraged and used for initiating and developing school-community cooperative efforts.

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